

Inspection report for Hillside Children's Centre

Local authority	Somerset
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Brook Green Early Years

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents and carers, centre managers and frontline staff. They also met with a number of partners and representatives from the local authority. The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Hillside is a phase one children's centre that provides the full core offer in partnership with other centres in the town and with a range of agencies. It is located in purpose-built accommodation which also houses childcare offered by a private provider. Almost all of the centre's provision takes place on this site, although some opportunities are beginning to be offered at other locations in the reach area.

The centre was first designated in 2005. From April 2011, it became part of a cluster of four centres that share management and service provision, but with its own advisory board. The centre serves an area of north Taunton that is one of the 30% most disadvantaged in the country, where the population is mainly White British and part of the reach is among the 10% most deprived areas. The proportion of families that are of minority ethnic origin and the percentage with English as an additional language are above the local authority averages. Although the proportion of children in workless households is below the national average, it is above that in the local authority. When children join the Early Years Foundation Stage, their skills are generally below the levels expected for their age, particularly in communication and language.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

3

Main findings

Hillside is a satisfactory and improving children's centre. It provides an attractive, welcoming, and safe environment that is valued by parents and carers. The commitment of the staff to the well-being of families is strong and the support and guidance provided are much appreciated by users of the centre. The wide range of provision is of good quality and, as a result, most outcomes are satisfactory and improving as the new arrangements for leadership and management have increasing impact.

The centre has been successful in securing a good understanding among parents and carers of how to ensure their family's safety. They are well supported in developing their parenting skills by the good services provided in the centre, through home visits and help with safety equipment in the home where necessary. The centre's arrangements for safeguarding children are good and staff are well trained.

Centre staff go to considerable lengths to ensure that families facing particular challenges are supported well. As a result, confidence and self-esteem improve and good progress is often made in overcoming difficulties. Discreet and individualised support is provided in addressing personal issues, for example stopping smoking and sexual health. Good links have been established with partners in the community, for example the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Shelter and the local community centre, to enable families to obtain support and guidance easily and quickly on particular concerns such as housing and benefits. Families from minority ethnic backgrounds have received individualised help, for example through an interpreter, and support with finding accommodation, and staff work very hard to include all families. Help with transport to events is often provided for those who would otherwise find these difficult to access.

Activities held in the centre are well planned and all those observed were of good quality. Staff take considerable trouble to identify and respond to the needs of group members. Managers have correctly identified that the impact of provision on the well-being and development of participants is not currently being effectively evaluated at planned points in the months after an event. Plans are in place to

address this, for example through an imminent 'reunion' of those who have undertaken the 'Positive Parenting Program'. Partnerships with other agencies and organisations, such as Children's Social Care and Barnardo's, are strong and make a good contribution to identifying and meeting the needs of target groups, for example isolated parents and those in need of extra support with parenting skills

There has been some success in promoting the learning and development of a few parents and carers so that they can obtain skills and qualifications that could help them to access further training and opportunities for employment. Managers have rightly identified that the centre is not yet fully successful in addressing these needs, particularly for the centre's target groups, such as teenage parents, and new provision is to begin shortly in partnership with a local college of further education.

Following a period of some disruption to leadership and management due to the illness of the previous centre head and to the local authority adopting a cluster model, new leadership has successfully ensured high morale among the staff who are eager to bring about further improvement for the benefit of families in the reach area. Leaders have a clear and largely accurate view of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. The advisory board has not met since February 2011 and has thus been unable to fulfil its role of enabling staff, partners and users to review, challenge and support the work of the centre. A meeting of the advisory board is planned soon to begin to re-establish it. Some planned actions are to be implemented shortly, such as those to increase opportunities for users to contribute to the development of the centre. Other actions have not yet had enough time to have their full impact on outcomes for some target groups, such as the support for young parents and the unemployed in moving into the world of work. Consequently, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is currently satisfactory and improving.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop more rigorous approaches to evaluating the impact of the centre's provision on the well-being and development of users in the medium and longer term.
- Improve the support provided for teenage parents and those currently not in work in engaging with education and training prior to moving into the world of employment.
- Develop the role of the advisory board so that it offers appropriate scrutiny and challenge to support further improvement in the work and impact of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Families benefit from a range of activities to promote a healthy lifestyle, particularly those focused on a balanced diet. For example, the 'Lunch, munch and play' group for dads places a strong emphasis on healthy meals which are produced during the session for dads and their children to eat. The 'Fun with food' group was provided in

response to needs identified by parents and carers. Exercise is often promoted through sessions within other provision. However, data show the rate of obesity for children in the reach has risen and is now high. Counselling available in the centre promotes the emotional health and well-being of those involved. Although provision is available at another centre in the cluster, much energy has gone into bringing midwives' provision to support breastfeeding to the centre – without success so far.

Users report feeling safe in the centre and are confident that any problems are quickly tackled and resolved. Parents and carers trust staff and are confident in sharing their personal concerns and circumstances. For example, women affected by domestic violence have been sensitively steered towards appropriate support. The Common Assessment Framework is used well to establish levels of need. The most vulnerable families, including those where children are on the child protection register, are well supported by the centre through home visits and one-to-one help, as well as through good partnerships with other agencies.

Families enjoy the varied opportunities provided by the centre. Groups are often popular, for example the 'Twins and Multiples' group. The early years team is taking action to improve children's progress with their skills and knowledge in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There is a particular focus on speaking and listening, following a slowing in 2011 in the rate of improvement by the end of Reception. Both local and national initiatives to help children with their speaking skills have been introduced to Early Years Foundation Stage staff and are now being implemented. Adults have benefited from opportunities to enhance their personal development through a wide range of activities in the centre, but numbers have been small on courses designed to improve basic skills prior to further training or moving towards employment.

Relationships between staff and users of the centre are good. Hillside's profile in the community is strengthening and there are plans to develop this further. Parents and carers have frequent opportunities to give their views on the events they attend and informal dialogue is good. However, the opportunity to contribute views and ideas through the advisory board has not been available in recent months and the 'Parent Talk' forum has also been in abeyance and is about to be revived. Good partnerships with the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Shelter result in valuable support for families facing challenges, and one-to-one support helps the most vulnerable to access necessary benefits and services. There has been some disruption in help provided for adults to access the world of work in recent months that is outside the centre's control. Jobcentre Plus has just concluded an agreement to provide support in the future.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare	2

concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre building provides very good accommodation and, although located at one end of the reach, it is situated near other community provision to which families are directed when appropriate. Local organisations, such as the community centre and the church, promote the centre as part of their work.

Centre staff take trouble to build a good knowledge of the needs of families that is supported by improving information from partner agencies and knowledge gleaned from home visits. The centre is using information increasingly well to establish what provision may be necessary. There is a good range of opportunities for centre users, including target groups such as young and lone parents, and staff work well to respond to the needs that emerge during activities. Resources for the dads' lunchtime group were carefully chosen and dads were making good use of these to play with and talk to their children. In the baby massage group, the particular needs of the mothers were addressed well. 'Fun with food' provided good opportunities for sensory play and for children to understand basic hygiene. New outreach provision is being developed in the part of the reach area furthest from Hillside, and the centre celebrates the achievements of its families appropriately.

Staff provide a good level of care and support for adults and children. The centre is particularly good at building opportunities to meet outside agencies into courses provided so that those in need of particular help are able to make discreet approaches and avoid any possible embarrassment. New approaches to planning activities, adopted from June 2011, involve a sharp focus on the outcomes desired from a particular event or course, with suitable 'milestones' to judge the progress of participants. This is being used well and is supporting staff in evaluating the impact of provision more effectively and making any adjustments necessary to meet needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The new cluster arrangements were implemented with appropriate attention to the need to build new relationships and confidence among staff. There is effective day-to-day management and strategic direction, with enthusiastic and skilled staff in the key roles of cluster manager and lead centre officer, as well as other senior posts. The detailed business plan for the centre's development sets out appropriate actions, although the criteria to evaluate success are not always precise enough and linked sufficiently to measurable outcomes. The advisory board was established in its operations before the new cluster arrangements, although numbers attending were small. Plans are well advanced for its first meeting since the reorganisation. Outcomes for families are mostly satisfactory at present and the centre is working hard to improve the proportion of families engaging in its services from the reach area. At present, Hillside provides satisfactory value for money.

The centre has good partnerships with a wide range of other agencies and organisation. These include health visitors and the Youth Service as well as the Priorswood Community Centre and the local church. Hillside also benefits from collaborative working with other centres in the cluster.

Safeguarding arrangements are good with all necessary policies and procedures properly implemented and understood well by staff, parents and carers. Staff work well with other agencies to protect children's welfare and levels of care are high. Activities are carefully risk assessed and the condition of the building is checked daily for any possible dangers to users. The centre places a high priority on including all families and staff routinely provide additional support that makes all the difference to target groups being able to engage with the work of the centre to meet their needs. This includes parents and carers with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who receive good assistance in gaining any extra support needed.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and	3

effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Brook Green Early Years was inspected in September 2010 and its overall provision was judged good. The capacity of the provision to maintain continuous improvement was also found to be good, and strong processes of self-evaluation were judged to result in well-considered action plans. Children's individual needs were being met very well and children were found to be making good progress.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Hillside Children's Centre on 14–15 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. Many aspects are improving and some are already good.

The centre does a number of things well. Activities are well planned to meet your varying needs and we saw much enjoyment in the sessions we visited. You are provided with valuable guidance, often through home visits and one-to-one support. Hillside is welcoming and has good partnerships with other agencies and the community. These help you in many ways, for example with advice on housing and benefits. Arrangements for protecting children's welfare are good. Staff work well to ensure the centre is a safe place and that children have the services they need.

Some opportunities for courses in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology have been provided. However, we have recommended that the centre should press ahead with its plans to provide more services to help you to prepare for future employment and also to prepare your children more

effectively for starting school. Your views on the quality of activities and on how things could be improved are collected regularly. The centre is starting to gather views on how the courses provided have helped you after some months have gone by and we have asked managers to proceed with this work. The advisory board has not met since February 2011. It is to meet soon and we have asked the centre to press ahead with developing its role.

The arrangements for the leadership and management of Hillside changed in April when the centre joined a cluster. The cluster manager and the staff have a clear idea of Hillside's strengths and areas where improvement is needed. Some of the actions they have planned are about to be taken and some others have not had enough time to have their full impact yet. However, all the staff are keen to make the centre even better and we are confident that they are doing the right things.

We would like to thank those of you who were available to talk to us about the ways Hillside has helped you. It is clear that you value the opportunities and care that the centre provides. We would like to wish you every success in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.